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### Finding Aid to the North Dakota Writers' Project Ethnic Group Files

#### North Dakota Writers' Project Ethnic Group Files

North Dakota Writers' Project Ethnic Group Files Records, 1939-1940

3 microfilm reels

Collection number: Microfilm F635.N68 1989

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#### OVERVIEW

**Links:** [North Dakota Biography Index](#)

**Access:** The collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Institute.

**Provenance:** Acquired through purchase.

**Property rights:** The State Historical Society of North Dakota owns the property rights to the original records.

**Copyrights:** Copyrights to this collection is held by State Historical Society of North Dakota.

**Citation:** [Identification of item]. North Dakota Writers' Project Ethnic Group Files.

#### HISTORY

The North Dakota Writers' Project began in 1935 for the purpose of gathering information on a variety of topics of interest to the state; the Ethnic Group Files are one of sixteen series of records produced. The Project was set up and sponsored by the Division of Women's and Professional Projects, Works Progress Administration, and the State Historical Society of North Dakota. In 1942 the Writers' Project completed their survey work and disbanded.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT

The North Dakota Writers' Project **Ethnic Group Files Records** are one of several projects carried out by the Work Projects Administration in the 1930s and early 1940s. The files contain interviews with members of various North Dakota ethnic groups. The material was gathered by staff members of the North Dakota Writers' Project. The material was to have been used as a background for a publication entitled *Hard Wheat*, which was never published. The individual biographical essays have been indexed and are searchable in the North Dakota Biography Index.

The Ethnic Group Files organize information alphabetically by name within each ethnic group. The files contain biographical sketches and immigrants' reminiscences, histories of ethnic settlements, bibliographies, and newspaper clippings. The files came from an unpublished compilation of inventories to collections housed in the State Historical Society of North Dakota.

Following the Scope and Content are copies of the 'Instructions for Interviewing' and also 'Instructions for writing personal histories (social-ethnic essays)' that the county worker used. Not all North Dakota counties participated in this specific writers' project. Among the topics to include in each essay were where the person was born and when, brief description of their home in the 'Old County', their education and religion in the 'Old County', recreation, reasons for emigration, preparations for the trip to America and the trip to America, reasons why they settled where they did, their farming experiences including current federal programs, raising their family, the informants views on current events, recreation activities, views on America's entry into World War I, what they think of the present European situation and the person's native country, and comparing the person's native country and America. Finally, if they had life to live over, how would the person change it?

The North Dakota Writers' Project **America Eats Records**, another WPA project, were filmed with the Ethnic Group Files and are located at the end of reel three. The records span from 1937 to 1941 and consist of correspondence, recipes, menus, and notes describing the diet and food preparation of North Dakota pioneers and ethnic groups. It includes articles describing specific Sunday school picnics, 4-H Club Achievement banquets, church dinners and suppers, and articles on food preparation in specific North Dakota counties. This data was assembled for a proposed publication entitled "America Eats", for which a manuscript (11 leaves) was prepared and submitted to the federal WPA office in 1941 and is located at the very end of the microfilm reel. Apparently the book was never published.

North Dakota Writers' Project

NDWP Letter #1

Social-Ethnic  
Studies

INSTRUCTIONS FOR INTERVIEWING

Before calling on informant, know definitely what information you want to obtain. Before asking informant any questions, state the purpose of your visit and the use to be made of the material gathered. For your personal histories (social-ethnic essays), your explanation should be approximately as follows:

The Writers' Project is making a study of the State of North Dakota in terms of its people--where they came from, how they happened to come to North Dakota; their problems of earning a living in a new country; their part in the upbuilding of the country; interesting stories they have to tell of pioneer days; their experiences during the different periods, including the depression; and their views on present conditions. At the present time throughout the State the following groups are cooperating in the study: Scandinavians, Finns, Russians, Germans, French, Syrians, Canadians, Ukrainians, Dutch, Lithuanians, English, Greeks, and Americans who have come here from the eastern states. We should like to have this community represented in the study; and you have been recommended to the project as a person with accurate knowledge, a good memory, and good judgment. Any assistance you give us must be entirely voluntary on your part. This material will be used for no other purpose than in the writing of this story, and your name will not be used without your permission.

The topics to be covered are outlined in the attached instructions for writing your essay. These topics are to be woven into one complete story, and you should make the story as complete as possible. Wherever a question is not answered, write the office regarding it, explaining why it was not answered, etc.

With every essay, try to get interesting stories from informant, and, if necessary write those stories up separately.

In interviewing, establish a friendly and confidential relation with informant. Do not cross-examine him, but use these instructions as a guide to be kept in mind and adapted to the specific situation and person. Your method should be to get informant to talking freely about himself, and in the course of easy, natural conversation, draw him out, guiding the conversation skillfully along each topic, and endeavor to exhaust each topic before leaving it. Never contradict. Often times two or three visits are better than one. Do not tire informant. Always ask informant if you may call again if you need additional information, even if you do not believe you will return.

If you have any difficulties or anticipate any problems in connection with this work, WRITE THE STATE OFFICE IMMEDIATELY.

Instructions for writing personal histories (social-ethnic essays):

In the upper right-hand corner of the first page of each personal history should be the following:

County: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name of \_\_\_\_\_  
 field worker \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of in-  
 formant (Person  
 interviewed): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Place of inter-  
 view: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Sec. 12-130-77 Blank Township  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_ N. D.

(Keep the essay in first person and in exact words of informant as nearly as possible)

I. I was born in \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_, 18\_\_

(The story is continued to cover the following topics:)

Brief description of old country home (farm or residence, and countryside or village)

II. Education and religion in Old Country.

Leaving school to work.

Occupation of informant in Old Country. Tell of labor conditions, wages, method of farming, equipment, livestock, etc.; terms of rental, or ownership and taxes; labor organizations; wages for labor. Attendance at church, confirmation, etc.

III. Recreation - parties, songs sung, (get words, as well as titles.) different kind of dances; describe typical wedding.

IV. Reasons for deciding to emigrate from country of birth, whether due to political, economic, or religious oppression. (Give full story with details. Do not simply state "for better opportunities; to escape serving in army".) What were the actual stories he had heard of opportunities existing in America; or what actual conditions existed in Old Country that informant found intolerable? State instances or incidents.

V. Preparations for trip to America: How was trip financed--by relatives in this country who sent money for transportation, by sale of property in old country, etc.? What personal effects were sold; what did informant bring to America with him? Were farewell parties given? Describe. Did other members of group emigrate at the same time or previously or later?

VI. Date and place of departure for America. Describe ocean voyage, route, conditions on board, storms, amusing incidents, etc. Arrival in America, first impressions, disappointments, surprises, etc.

VII. What attracted informant to place of first residence; did other members of same racial group live there? Where did they come from? Tell of first job in America (wages, conditions, etc. as compared to those in Old Country), or of taking a homestead. Language difficulties. Tell amusing incidents or experiences of first days or years in America. What has been occupation of informant since coming to this country? Where informant did not come direct-

ly to North Dakota, give the above information for each place of residence; length of residence, etc.; reason for moving to new location in each case. Tell of first North Dakota home, neighbors, privations, early parties (such as dancing parties, box socials, literary meetings, debates, etc.).

- VIII. a. Ask informant for the story of his farming experiences from arrival to present date, showing changes in method of farming, in equipment, in acreage cultivated, in land ownership--progress and reverses--what he considers best source of farm income, poorest, difficulties of farming in North Dakota. Full treatment.
- b. Tell the full story of his farming experiences during the depression, of his sale of cattle to the Government--his attitude on it; how his standard of living was lowered; what he thought the causes of it were.
- c. Tell fully what he thinks of the County Agricultural Conservation Association (crop control programs of the Soil Conservation Service--(wheat allotment, etc.)
- d. What effect has the depression had on informant's family in regard attending school, finding work, holding jobs, etc.? Tell Fully.
- e. What does he think of the Government's dam building program--of the proposed irrigation projects--etc.?
- f. What is his attitude toward the programs of the Farm Security Administration and WPA?
- g. Has he received any benefits under the FSA or WPA programs? Explain.
- h. What does he think of present conditions? What does he think of Government aid for North Dakota people, of its administration, its faults, and its benefits? What would he suggest to improve present conditions in this country?
- IX. Tell story of raising family (birthplace, nationality of wife; names, ages, birthplaces, present occupations of children), of their schooling, etc. When was English first used in the home? Is it used altogether at the present time? What newspapers and magazines has informant subscribed to? What at the present time? Where published? Any foreign-language newspaper or magazines; where published?
- X. What forms of recreation are popular with informant's family at present time? What hobbies? What decorations, furniture, household equipment, foods, etc. set home apart as a \_\_\_\_\_-American home?
- XI. Did informant favor America's entering the World War? Tell Fully. Did he lose money in the post-war bank failures? Tell full story, if possible. What was his period of greatest prosperity, of greatest loss? Tell Fully.
- XII. What does informant think of present European situation? What part, if any should America play? How does he think his native country is being affected by it? What part should that country play? Give informant's views fully and in his exact words.
- XIII. In looking back over his life, ask informant to compare the two countries--America and his native country, in which way each is superior. If he had his life to live over, how would he change it? Tell a full story here.

## MICROFILM LIST

### Microfilm Reel 1

Note to Researchers

Instructions for Interviewing

Instructions for writing personal histories (social-ethnic essays)

The Record extracts, 1902 & 1904 (regarding German Russians in McIntosh County)

"Where Life is Better" by James Rorty (extracts). 1934-1935 (5 p.)

"On New Shores, Chapter VI, by Konrad Bercovici. "The German Russians of North Dakota" (6 p.)

"Toward an Understanding of the Russian Germans," by S. Joachim (26 p.)

"The German Russians in North Dakota" North Dakota Historical Collections. Vol. '1 (3 p.)

Socio-Ethnic Speeches—

Address of Major Powell to North Dakota Constitutional Convention, Aug. 5, 1889

"Bridging the Economic Gap," by Mrs. Florence Kerr (11 p.)

Address by F.C. Harrington before the U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1939

Working outline of other State Writers' Projects file—

"Outline and program for the Negro Press in Chicago" (4 p.)

"The Irish of New York" (4 p.)

"Suggestions on the Writing of Portuguese in New England" (14 p.)

"Cults, religion and magic in Chicago" (5 p.)

"Outline for Social-Ethnic Study of North Dakota. Theme: Hard Wheat" (38 p.)

"Manual for the National Social-Ethnic Study of the Lithuanian in America" (55 p.)

"Scandinavians in the Northwest, 1861-1939: Instructions for Socio-Ethnic Field Studies" (15 p.)

Supplementary instructions to the American Guide Manual: Manual for Social-Ethnic Studies" (13 p.)

"North Dakota Socio-Economic Conditions and Problems: Outline" (15 p.)

General Ethnic Group (2 files with this label)

[North Dakota Ethnic Group Biographies]

American

Austrian

Bohemian

Canadian

Danish

Includes: "History of Danish settlement in Hill Township [Cass County]." by  
Waldemar C. Westergard

Dutch

English

Filipino

Finish

Includes: "Essay on Finnish People"

French

Includes "Wild Rice the town"

French Canadian

German

Germans from Russia-Benson County

Germans from Russia-Cavalier County

Germans from Russia-Logan County: "A History of Our German-Russian Settlers." by

Nina Arntz

Germans from Russia- McHenry County

## Microfilm Reel 2

Germans from Russia-McIntosh County

Includes: "German-Russia Pioneers." by W.A. Moench

Germans from Russia-McKenzie County: "German-Russia Pioneers." by Herbert Roth

Germans from Russia-McLean County

Germans from Russia-Morton County

Germans from Russia- Pierce County: "Germans from Russia History of Pierce County."

"Interview of O.T. Tofsrud," by Hazel Stern.

Germans from Russia- Stark County

Germans from Russia- Ward County

Greek

Hungarian

Icelandic

Includes: "The Icelandic Settlement of Pembina County." by Sveinbjorn Johnson

Irish

Irish-Welsh (1 biography)

Jewish

Lithuanian

Includes: Letter from Department of Commerce, Census of the Lithuanians in  
North Dakota." By Leon E. Truesdale

Luxemburg

Norwegian: General Information, Socio-Ethnic, Norwegians. Appendix - Census of 1890

Norwegian-Adams County

Norwegian-Benson County

Includes: *Hallingen* magazine issue, included in Jenson Interview.

Norwegian-Bottineau County

Norwegian-Burke County

Norwegian-Burleigh County: General Information, Socio-Ethnic, Norwegians. Appendix  
- Census of 1890, by Fred Anderson

Norwegian-Cavalier County

Norwegian-Center: General Information, Socio-Ethnic, Norwegians. Appendix - Census  
of 1890

Norwegian-Divide County

Norwegian-Griggs County

Includes: General Information, Socio-Ethnic, Norwegians. Appendix - Census of  
1890. The First Norwegian Settlement in Griggs County, By Omon P.  
Herigstad.

Includes: "The First Norwegian Settlement in Griggs County." "Conditions in Norway Contributing to Emigration to America." "The Coming of the First Settlers." "Old Country Customs in the Settlement." "Americanization and Growth of Settlement." List of Sons of the More Common Norwegian Dishes." By Owen B. Herigstad.

Norwegian-McHenry County

Includes: "Picking Buffalo Bones." By Melhouse family

Norwegian-McKenzie County

Norwegian-McLean County

Norwegian-Oliver County

Norwegian-Pembina County

Norwegian-Richland County

Norwegian-Sargent County

Norwegian-Towner County

Norwegian-Traill County

### Microfilm Reel 3

Norwegian-Williams County

Norwegian (Iowa)-Griggs County

Norwegian (Minnesota)-Griggs County

Norwegian Icelandic: "Norwegians and Icelanders in the Red River Valley."

Polish

Russian

Scandinavian: General Information, Socio-Ethnic, Norwegians. Scandinavian. Appendix - Census of 1890.

Swedish: General Information (Socio-Ethnic) Swedes. "History of Swedes in North Dakota." Maple Sheyenne, by Myrtle Bemis

Swedish: General Information (Socio-Ethnic) Swedes. "History of Swedes in North Dakota." Barnes County: Hobart, Litchville, Wasa, Klara. Bottineau County: Souris. Burleigh County: Bismarck, Slaughter. Maple Sheyenne: Herby, Fargo. Griggs County. Grand Forks County: Grand Forks. McLean County. Ransom County: Alice Town township. Steele County: Hofva. Traill County. Walsh County: Adams. Emigration from Sweden. Foreign Born Swedes by Counties, From the 1900 Census., by Myrtle Bemis

Swedish: Foreign born Swedes by Counties Census 1900.

Swedish: General Information (Socio-Ethnic) Swedes, by J.T. Frederick

Swedish-Adams County

Swedish-Benson County

Includes: "Settlement of Swedes from Hickson, North Dakota at Klara, Benson County, ND, 1887", by B.P. Ronglie

Swedish-Bottineau County

Swedish-Burke County

Swedish-Cavalier County

Swedish-Dickey County



Swedish-Divide County

Swedish-Eddy County

Swedish-Griggs County: General Information (Socio-Ethnic) Swedes, from State  
Historical Society of North Dakota, Vol., p. 272-274, Griggs County

Swedish-Oliver County

Swedish-Richland County

Swedish-Rolette County

Swedish-Sargent County

Swedish-Towner County

Swedish-Traill County

Swedish-Williams County

Swiss

Syrian

Includes: "Brief History of the Attiyeh." "Aim of the Attiyeh Society." "To the  
Attiyehs." "Program of the Attiyeh Society Convention." "Committees."

Ukrainian

Includes: "Churches of Butte, McLean County, N.D." by Marie Moseanko

## **America Eats Records**

Instruction – Letter from Ethel Schlasinger, State Director, North Dakota Writers' Project

### **Source Material Series**

Adams County: "Sunday School Picnic," by Alyce M. Sims, 1937 (3 p.)

Barnes County: "Sixth Annual 4-H Club Achievement Banquet," by Fred J. Reher, 1937 (2 p.)

[Unknown County]: "A Typical Meal," by Paul Rognlie (3 p.)

Cass County: "Outline of Essay according to the letter of instructions sent to me by the state  
office, by Claire Jackson (3 p.)

"An Annual Church Supper in North Dakota, 1941 (9 p.)

Foster County: "An American Meal" (Masonic Lodge, Aurora #56), by E.L. Horton, 1937 (3 p.)

Grand Forks County: "Appreciation Supper" (Grace Baptist Church, Grand Forks, N.D.), by Mr.  
Osborn, 1941 (7 p.)

Griggs County: "An Annual Church Dinner in Griggs County" by Claire Jackson, 1941 (6 p.)

Logan/McIntosh Counties: [untitled], by Nina Arntz, 1937 (2 p.)

McHenry County: "Typical Meals," by Ralph Holm, 1937 (3 p.)

McKenzie County: "Typical Meals," Olga J. Lassey, 1937 (2 p.)

McLean County: Article published in the Washburn Leader newspaper, 1939-1941

Waffle Supper at Lutheran Church Tuesday, Feb. 16 & 24, 1939

Pancake Supper Next Big Event, Nov. 30, 1939

Pancake Supper Date Set for December 3, Nov. 21, 1940

Batter Boys will be Ready at Zero Hour, Nov. 28, 1940

1940 Pancake Supper is Now Past History, Dec. 5, 1940

Pancake Feed to be served November 7, [n.d.]

Side Glances on and off Main Street, Nov. 6, 1941

Pancake Supper is Now Past History, Nov. 13, 1941

Mercer County: "American Menu," by Mr. Keller and T.S. Brown (1 p.)

Mountrail County: "Typical Meals: Country Church Suppers (2 p.)

Oliver County: Center Eveready Homemakers Club Menu (2 p.) and "Norwegian Dinner" (1 p.)

Richland County: Narrative of a Supper Given at Wahpeton (First Congregational Church), by  
F. G. Callan, 1937 (3 p.)

Traill County: "Typical Meals," by Clarence Anderson, 1937 (2 p.)

"Typical Meals" (3 p.)

"North Dakota Dines" (3 p.)

"America Eats" (2 p.)

"Thanksgiving Dinner in a School Dormitory" (2 p.)

"Poppy Seed Biscuits (Bohemian Kolasky) (1 p.)

Bowman & Slope Counties: "Recipes" by Clifford Puckett (23 p.)

**Correspondence Series, 1941**

**Manuscript Series** (3 versions, each 11 leaves)

"Final draft, mailed to Washington 12/9/41"